



Cigarette by alysrose

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Summary: His life had always been in limbo. He hadn't been able to feel anything since his whole world had crumbled around him when his daughter was taken from him. He lived each day as though it was his last; without a care in the world and always with a cigarette lit. But he had found someone who made him feel alive again. Except fate seemed to have other ideas.

1. 1:1

CHAPTER ONE

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Angel Eyes

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*'Sick of leaving in the morning
With the night you gave away
So now I'm gonna take that all that I can get
With those angel eyes
You make saints do sins all the time.'*

Angel Eyes, Wet Wet Wet

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Anna Fitzgerald knew she had made a mistake when she woke up that morning.

The scent of whisky and cigarettes hung heavy in the air like a thick, thunderous cloud above her head. She allowed her eyes to flutter close, the startling bright sunlight peeking through the crack in the curtain being an unwelcome introduction to the end of an adventurous night and the beginning of a day filled with self-hatred. Anna allowed a light sleep to carry her away for a few minutes, which was mostly helped with the warmth of him behind her. She was aware of his strong arms pulling her closer to him, his breath on her shoulder.

She basked in the feeling of him a little longer, allowing herself to wake up in that time. She allowed her gaze to observe her surroundings; their clothes strewn across the floor and furnishings having been taken off in a hurry, like the many times before. She stared at the door as the memory of him kicking it shut behind him as he carried her, legs wrapped around his torso, into the shack a mere few hours ago seeped into her memory, the slam of the door

slapping her across the face.

"You stayed the night," he said, sounding surprised.

He shifted behind her but never moved away from her, his hand still remained in hers, fingers intertwined. She kept quiet, her voice having all but disappeared.

Anna turned around in his arms; her long tresses sweeping across the pillow as she moved to settle in front of him, her bare chest moulding into his. As she looked up at him, she was aware of him staring at her; his gaze heavy with tiredness and a hangover. His hand rested against the base of her back, just as Anna brushed her lips against his, smiling as she felt him kiss her back. It wasn't as passionate as the night before, but was more comforting, a moment having been shared between them that had been needed. She tenderly rested her hand on his face, his stubble tickling her palm.

"I should go," Anna whispered, her voice croaky with tiredness.

"Stay—" Hopper started, just as his alarm began to bleat out the familiar and unwanted tune. "—Fuck this shit!"

He removed his hand from her and reached over back onto his side for the alarm, its annoying beeping ruining their moment. As he scrambled to turn it off, Anna took that moment to slip out of the bed and pull the checked red blanket around her nude body leaving him with a thin sheet. She smirked as he struggled with the snooze button, before she came to his side and pressed it down for him.

She took it from him and placed it back upon the bedside table. His watchful gaze burned at her skin, and she took a moment before she allowed herself to look at him, steadyng herself.

Jim Hopper was not the man she should be in love with. And yet here she was, stood in front of him, heart hammering against her chest as he stared into her soul. His kisses marked every inch of her, his fingertips had caused goosebumps to scatter across her body, and his love had warmed her during the cold night.

He reached for her hand and pulled her towards him. She leaned over

and kissed him once more before she forced herself to collect her clothes from the floor and get dressed in the bathroom.

As soon as she closed the door behind her, the clasp sounding behind her, she rested against the hard surface for a moment to regain her breath and try to calm the butterflies that fluttered furiously in her stomach. Anna captured a glimpse at her reflection in the mirror and let out a sigh; and allowed a small smile to creep across her face. She fixed her appearance in the dim lighted bathroom and quickly dressed in the clothes she wore the night before. Once she was done, she took a seat on the edge of the bath to bide some time, not wanting to look eager to leave. She wanted nothing more than to stay but she knew the responsibilities of a new day needed her attention, despite the overpowering urge to just lock the door on the world for just one more day and spend it with Hopper. She glanced at her watch, a few minutes having crept by, and stood up, brushing herself down.

She unlocked the door to the bathroom to find Hopper sat on the edge of the bed with his uniform on, his hair slicked back, and a cigarette in his mouth.

"I'll give you a ride over to your place," Hopper told her as he stood to his full height. He placed his aviator sunglasses on and grabbed his felt ranger hat from the back of the couch.

She slipped out of his trailer and into his Chevrolet Blazer in a shade to match his uniform, before allowing the world to pass her by as he raced down the long, winding roads of the town. He flicked through the radio until he found the station he liked before singing along.

"Have you got any plans for tonight?" Hopper asked once his Chevrolet came to a halt in front of her house.

Anna smirked, tipping her head in amusement. "Yeah. To not end up in your bed again."

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Anna allowed the water to cascade down her body, the water soaking her cigarette scented hair, and washing all the remnants of the night

before from her body. As she closed her eyes against the downpour of water, she could still feel the tender kisses that Hopper had placed across her body, and the way he had held her just mere hours ago. It hadn't been the first time she had ended up in his bed, and she was sure it wouldn't be there last, but Anna couldn't shake the feeling of it being different in a way to all the other times.

Jim Hopper was not a man who could be easily read, and sometimes his abrupt manner was off putting to few. But she knew the kind soul that was hidden behind the many years of loss, heartache and grief. She could only hope that others would see that, too.

It had been different in every sense. Her memory albeit jaded from the copious amount of whisky she had consumed, she could remember the way he kissed her and the way he held her for most of the night, as if he was scared he was going to wake up and she wouldn't be there. She would leave in the middle of the nights, knowing that she wouldn't be able to deal with the awkwardness of the reality of the morning after.

A harsh, sober reality where nothing could hide in the unforgiving daylight.

She stepped out of the shower and quickly dried herself, slipping into her uniform consisting of a white dress, a pinafore apron and a nurse's cap. As she stared at herself in the mirror in her bedroom, she never tired of seeing herself in the uniform; a proud achievement in every sense. She dried her hair naturally and pinned her natural waves up in a classic bun style.

Once she was finished, she grabbed her trench coat and leather handbag, before making her way down to her black Impala. She waved to her neighbours who, themselves, were heading off for a long day at work and school. With the vision of home retreating in her rear-view mirror, she set off for work at the hospital, knowing that anything could be waiting for her through the double doors.

Her mind kept wandering back to Jim Hopper during her drive; he was never too far from her thoughts. Even her subconscious mind would sometimes conjure up thoughts of him when she least expected it.

As she pulled into the parking lot of the hospital, she shook her head in an attempt to rid herself of any distracting thought of him.

But it seemed reality had other ideas when it came to Jim Hopper.

It wasn't long before her shift was nearing an end, the twelve hours having crept by her quickly as she was kept busy with patients. Her feet and back ached, and she couldn't wait to head home and eat a big bowl of pasta before she headed to bed. She was finishing up her last check of her patients before she handed over to the nurse working the night shift when a call came over the tannoy system requesting her personally. She furrowed her brow before bidding the patient goodnight.

Her shoes squeaked against the floor as she made her way to the nurse's station, her brow furrowed in confusion as she pondered why she had been called at the end of her shift.

The familiar face of Betty Montgomery came into view, the always smiling nurse beamed at her at the sight of her approaching. "Sorry about that, Anna. It's just we have a problem. You don't mind staying just a little longer, do you?"

"Not at all," Anna faked a smile, the exhaustion biting at her skin. "What's the problem?"

"Hopper came in with a few injuries," Betty explained to her. "Won't have any of us touch him. Apparently only wants you to take a look at him and patch him up. Tried to pass him off onto one of the other nurses but they all seemed to be happy he didn't want them. Are you okay with checking him over?"

Anna shrugged and sighed, despite the warmth in her stomach. "Sure. No problem."

"Thank you! He's in Bay Five," Betty nodded over to the bay where a vocal Hopper could be heard in the distance.

"Can you please refrain from touching me, Nurse... Simmons..."

Anna pulled the curtain back and saw a banged up Hopper sat on the trolley bed. Nurse Simmons was a patient woman, but Anna could see

the frustration in the older woman's eyes, how she regretted the thirty years of being nurse in that mere moment with Chief Hopper.

"I will relieve you of your duty now, Simmons," Anna smiled, seeing the relief replace the frustration that seemed to tighten every muscle in her body.

Nurse Simmons gave Hopper one last look and shook her head. "Are you sure you want to be left with this irritant?"

"Hey, I can hear you!" Hopper scoffed.

"I'm sure," Anna said, with a nod and a smirk, as she focused on Simmons. "You get yourself a break, okay?"

Anna pulled the curtain closed once Simmons had left the area. Anna turned around and allowed her gaze to skim over Hopper's bruised and marked face. She winced as she saw the busted lip and the start of a bruised eye.

"That looks bad, Jim," Anna commented, as she placed a gauze over the wound to his brow.

"Ain't nothin'," Hopper shrugged, but as she pressed down on his wound to check the size and deepness of the cut, he winced. Her eyes lifted to his. "That was just me... you know, wanting to seem human."

"Right," Anna smirked. "You know, this whole macho thing you've got going on, you don't have to be like that around me, right?"

Hopper stared at her for a moment, his eyes grazing her face. "You're a different type of species."

"Species, huh? How romantic."

Hopper swallowed the lump in his throat, readjusting his position on the bed. "Bad choice of word. I'm not great with them, y'know? It's just... you seem to care about me more than anyone I've ever met."

"More than anyone you've slept with?"

"It ain't that many," Hopper refuted, shaking his head. "I know it

seems like I sleep around all the time, but I don't. I wake up drunk most of the time, alone and with a deep, burning regret."

Anna smiled, reassuring him. "You don't have to prove yourself to me."

He offered her a grateful smile and allowed Anna to patch him up with ease, with Hopper turning out to be a decent patient for her. She wasn't sure if it was because she was treating him or because he understood he wouldn't be able to return to work without being seen by someone at the hospital.

"What time do you clock off?" Hopper asked just as Anna finished up.

"About ten minutes ago," she replied, watching the horror on his face. "I was tempted to pretend I didn't hear the announcement over the system and just race home."

Hopper chuckled in response and simply shook his head. "You sure I can't persuade you to stay the night with me again?"

A blush spread across her cheeks and his eyes lit up.

"You sure you didn't get hit in the face just to ask me that question?"

"I guess we'll never know, huh?" Hopper smiled, standing to his full height and placing his hat back onto his head.

"Maybe you need a nurse during the night," Anna whispered with a smirk. "I guess you have persuaded me."

Hopper leaned in for a kiss, gently cupping her face with his large hand. "I have to file a report about this," he pointed to his face. "But if you head to mine, there's a spare key under the dead plant beside the door. Be safe, okay?"

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2. 1:2

CHAPTER TWO

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Back In My Body

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*'All along the highway there's a tiny whispering sound
Saying I could find you in the dark of any town
But I know that I am here and in the poem of my mind
Sullen, twisted words finding their way in every line.'*

Back In My Body, Maggie Rogers

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Will Byers knew he should have been home by now.

His house was on the outskirts of Hawkins and was surrounded by an overwhelming amount of woodland, with the journey from Mike's house in the suburbs being the longest ride out of all four friends. Time had passed them all by that Saturday with their morning game of Dungeons and Dragons having surpassed their usual record and stemming into the evening, and before they had all realised, the town in which they lived had plunged into darkness as night fell around them, signalling their brand new record.

After he had bid Mike and his parents a goodnight and a quick thank you for hosting him for the day, he cycled home with Lucas and Dustin, dropping them off at their respected houses on his way. He would occasionally glance at his watch and peddle a little faster when the time pushed on later than he had expected it to be. His mom and brother would be worried if he stayed out any later even though it was only just past his curfew.

As soon as Lucas and Dustin had left his side, he peddled as quickly as his legs could take him, an unsettling feeling washing over him the longer he stayed out. There was something he couldn't quite put his

finger on as to why he felt weird that night, but he knew he wasn't going to stick around to find out.

He came to the one last long stretch of road heading to his house and felt fear grip his heart.

He peddled harder and faster.

He could feel the cold air being sucked into his chest as his breathing hitched, the urge to get home being an overwhelming one.

It was his safe place where his mom and brother would be waiting for him. His mom worked every hour she could to keep the roof over his head, and his brother was doing his best to change his family's destiny with his passion for photography. Ever since his father left the family home, it had been a strain on the family in ways that a child shouldn't experience; he felt like it was his duty as a son to make his mom smile. But it wasn't always an easy feat, not when his mom was stressed out with the endless hours at work she did that stopped her from getting any peace or respite at home, or whenever he would show her his grades, she would simply smile and congratulate him, with her smile never quite reaching her eyes any more.

Jonathan had been working secretly to earn some extra money so that the pressure was off his mom but that also meant school was taking a back seat for him; a secret that was between two brothers never to be ushered to anyone else. He respected that, knowing the pressure was eased off his mom a little more.

He felt powerless in every sense, and there wasn't much else he could do.

He just hoped his mom wasn't mad at him when he returned home that evening; he didn't want to scare her or cause her any more added stress. He could see his house with it being in squinting distance, and he felt the muscles in his legs begin to tire as his peddling slowed down. But he persevered, hoping, even willing, his legs to keep going. As he neared home, he heard a growl in the woods around him, which caused a gasp of fear to escape his chest.

It wasn't uncommon to hear growls echo out of the usually ominously quiet woodland. The old yellow and brown leaves hustled in the wind as the sounds of the dead, weak trees began to creak at every push the wind gave which only seemed to add to his anxiety as his mind invented images of monsters hot on his trail. Except, when he looked back, stealing a glance at the darkened world around him, he found nothing untoward. But he felt it, deep down in the pits of his stomach, that someone – or *something* – was there.

But then, a gust of wind seemed to hurtle his bike off the road, sending it flying into a ditch. His feet scrambled to try and stay upright and on the bike, but it was too strong for his small body to comprehend, and then that's when he felt it.

A level of fear that he had never felt before in his young life.

The prickle of heat on his skin unsettled him, as if his body was burning from the inside out. Another growl sounded behind him and, as he rubbed his scratched and grazed knees, he lifted his gaze to the sky above him just in time to see the sky light up with cracks of lightning. As his eyes adjusted to the bright flashes, his ears popping at the booming waves of rumbling thunder. As quick as a flash was a figure in the lit-up sky that he doubted his own mind when the world around him became dark for those few moments as the thunder stormed around him.

He was still too far from home to run all the way, but he allowed his fright to take hold, the image of the figure burning in his mind, and he broke out in a run just as rain began to fall from the sky and bounce against the asphalt.

He ran as fast as his legs could carry him, but it seemed he wasn't making any progress. His feet pounded against the ground just as heavy as the rain drops that fell around him, his world lighting up once more but this time it was different. Headlights behind him signalled help, and he turned just in time for the vehicle to approach him and slow at the mere sight of him on the road.

He slowed, too. He was of an age where he knew he had to be wary of any slowing vehicles, his mother had tried to instil in him that, but he never truly understood the true danger of the reasons behind her

warnings. His young mind could never conjure up potential monsters who wore clothes like he did and spoke with kindness to him but with their intentions being unclear. The only monsters he really knew about were ones in his board games he would play with his friends, or even the monsters that hid in his closet or under his bed.

But as he turned, his eyes straining against the headlights, he waited with bated breath for the car to sidle up next to him. The person inside, shadowed by the headlights, rolled down the window and shuffled over.

"Will? What are you doing out here in this weather?"

The familiar voice of Miss Fitzgerald, a nurse who would help out at his school one day a week, filled his ears and a sense of relief washed over him. He didn't have time to answer before another clap of lightning filled the sky above him, its vicious attack on the thunderous sky unsettling him and causing him to jump.

"Jump in!" Miss Fitzgerald called out to him, opening the passenger door from inside.

As he scrambled inside, he was suddenly aware just how soaked he was; pain dropping from his hair and landing on his equally as wet jeans. Small puddles of water now sat in the footwell, the rainwater now soaked her seat, but she didn't seem concerned at that.

What she was concerned about was finding him by the side of the road, soaking wet, with no bicycle, with an obvious frightened look about him.

"Where's your bike?" she asked, as he looked to his side closest to the door as if it was going to be there.

"I fell... into a ditch," Will furrowed his brow a little, which only seemed to spark Anna's concern more.

"Is your mom at home?"

Will shook his head and played with his hands, wringing them anxiously.

"Is Jonathan home?"

As Will shook his head once more, Anna simply nodded and started up the car.

"We'll find your bike and strap it on the back," she said with a smile, albeit a concerned one. "I'll actually get some use for the bike holder. Bought the car thinking I'd go on lovely bike rides every chance I got, but alas."

Will let out a chuckle as she did a U-turn on the quiet roads. She drove back the way she came, following Will's meek instructions of where he'd been and where he had last had the bike in his possession. A couple of minutes later, and Anna slowed the vehicle down on the opposite side of the road. After doing another U-turn, she parked her car up on the muddy soil and instructed Will to remain in the car. She'd be quick, she promised, and as she exited the vehicle, she knew she had made a mistake as the rain made it harder for her to see.

A glint of silver, however, had signalled her down and it wasn't long before she had found it. She wheeled it back to her vehicle and attached it to the back, noticing the dent to the front of it. Anna entered the driver's side and offered Will a thumbs up, before she shook the rain off as though she was an animal.

"Right, let's get you home, shall we?" Anna said, starting up the vehicle and pulling back onto the road. The drive was a mere five minutes before she pulled off to the right, and travelled down the long, muddy drive towards Will's house.

The house was dark, with no lights on to signal any life within the walls. She was aware of the change in the family dynamic; the father having swanned off with a woman twenty years younger. She had simply raised an eyebrow at that when Hopper had told her, knowing there wasn't much she could do except quietly digest it. She ensured she kept an eye on Will, knowing that the boy struggled with change anyway, but having such a huge shift in his life must've been tough for a boy who would do anything to bring his father back.

"Do you know what time your mom or brother are going to be home?" she asked, parking on the grass in front of the house. She

switched the engine off, the headlights that had thrown his house in a golden spotlight now dimming to nothing.

Will shrugged, his answer unsure.

Anna felt her heart sink at that and nodded. "Have you had any dinner?"

Will shook his head. "I had lunch at Mike's house but that was hours ago."

Anna smiled and reached into the back seat of her car and pulled a pizza box onto her lap. "I was bringing this to a friend but I'm a little hungry now. What do you say?"

Will's eyes lit up and he was nodding enthusiastically. "I have a key."

As Will led her into the house, she took a moment to sweep her eyes along the state of the house. Although decorated simply, it had a homely feeling almost immediately. Will guided her to the kitchen and pulled out two plates for them from the overhead cupboard just as she placed the pizza box on the table.

They both ate in silence, the boy being hungrier than Anna had anticipated. She watched as he reached for a third slice and then hesitate, his gaze meeting hers.

"I'm a four slice kinda girl," she smirked, reaching for another one, which seemed to encourage him to appetize his hunger.

"Thank you for driving me home," Will said softly.

"You're welcome," she said with a smile. "I don't usually come this way but I'm visiting a friend."

"What friend?"

Jim Hopper flashed in her mind, but she knew he was not a topic who should be spoken about. She knew she should call him to let him know about the diversion of hers, but she knew he would take it differently. He was a one-night stand guy, but he would take her phone call as an excuse for her not to come by and spend the night

with him. But she also knew that if she didn't call then he would be searching the roads for her.

"Just a friend," she smiled. "Could I borrow your phone for a moment whilst I call my *friend* and tell them I'm going to be a bit late?"

Will nodded and pointed to the phone hung on the wooden wall. He continued to eat his slice of pizza as she stood from the seat and walked over to the handset.

She put his number in and lifted the phone to her ear.

"Hel-lo?" Jim's voice filled her ears and sparked life into the butterflies that flapped furiously in her tummy.

"It's me," she said before shaking her head at herself. "It's Anna. I've just brought Will Byer's home."

She was aware of young ears potentially eavesdropping on her conversation, and turned around, her hand covering her mouth in an attempt to muffle her conversation.

"I'm worried about him, Jim. He looked like he saw a ghost," she explained further. "He'd ridden into a ditch and was walking by the roadside."

"You think he was robbed?"

"No, but his bike looks like it's taken a hit that I don't think can be fixed," Anna explained, her gaze flicking back to the boy. "His mom isn't home either, and I think I'm going to stay until she gets here."

There was silence on the other end of the line and Anna closed her eyes as she knew it wasn't what he was expecting to hear, but the safety of the boy was more important. If she left the boy on his own and something happened, she would never be able to forgive herself.

"Okay... are you coming over after?"

"I'd like to," she whispered with a smile.

But it was then that she felt it. The overwhelming sense of dread

claim every inch of her, a darkness that seemed to prevail every thought, every worry, everything. She paused, straining her hearing as she zoned in on a sound she had never heard before. Every light in the house flashed off and on, which only seemed to cause every hair on her body to stand on end.

"Miss Fitzgerald?" Will's voice was low but panicked.

"Anna?" Hopper's voice on the other end of the line was concerned as he had heard the young boy call for her. "Anna?!"

She allowed the handset to drop, its cord bouncing it for a while, the distant crackle of Jim's voice audible. Anna closed the gap between her and Will, her gaze falling on the *thing* that Will was staring at, his eyes as wide as saucers.

She wasn't sure what it was, but she didn't have time to find out as the snarl filled the room. Anna could feel her heart beat furiously against her chest as she pulled Will closer to her protectively. The *thing* strained its neck, blindly reacting to their breathing. It moved its head almost in confusion, needing to ascertain what the hell was making the noise, as they merely stared wide-eyed at it.

It was only when Anna quietly moved backwards, pulling Will back with her, their feet cautious on the carpeted floor.

Its head was devoid of any facial features, its face resembling more of a flesh flower with many sharp teeth in its large open mouth.

As Anna inspected it without taking her gaze off the monster, she pulled Will behind her, knowing that if she needed to, she could ensure he was able to run away.

The floorboard beneath her foot creaked.

The monster screeched an ear-splitting shriek in response.

But neither one of them made it out of the door to safety.

Anna Fitzgerald and Will Byers were taken that night by the faceless monster and taken some place unknown to the inhabitants of Hawkins.

Except, it was everything Hawkins was but for years, it was void of all human existence.

Until now.